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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [FJ](#)

SUBJECT: MILITARY OFFICIAL ACCUSES U.S. AMBASSADOR OF  
INCITING MUTINY IN FIJI

11. (SBU) Summary: The Commander of Fiji's land forces has accused the Ambassador of having sought in November 2006 to incite a mutiny against military forces commander Commodore Verege Bainimarama. In a speech to troops, Colonel Pita Driti said April 12 that during a November 28 meeting with then acting commander and Driti, Ambassador Dinger and the UK and Australia high commissioners "tried to get me to overthrow the commander" Bainimarama himself made a similar claim last year. According to media reports, Driti, the third in command within the Fiji military forces (RFMF), is quoted in newspaper accounts as saying that if he ever had the power to do so, he would close the Australia and New Zealand embassies in Fiji for their criticism of the RFMF's coup. Other accounts say he threatened the closure of the U.S. and UK embassies as well. The embassy and the UK and Australian high commissions have jointly issued a denial to Driti's claim. End summary.

12. (SBU) RFMF Land Forces Commander Colonel Pita Driti accused three foreign embassies of inciting mutiny in the run-up to Fiji's December 5 military coup. Driti told more than 200 soldiers preparing to depart for UNAMI duties in Iraq that U.S. Ambassador Larry Dinger, UK High Commissioner Roger Sykes and Australia High Commissioner Jennifer Rawson had urged him and then acting RFMF commander, Captain Esala Teleni, to mutiny against RFMF commander Commodore Vorege Bainimarama. Bainimarama was in New Zealand at the time. According to an account in the Fiji Times, Driti said the envoys "came in and tried to get me to overthrow the commander a couple of days before the coup."

13. (SBU) Driti's accusation is not entirely new. Following the November meeting, a military spokesperson attempted to characterize the meeting as unannounced, "inappropriate" and as "trying to incite." He also sought to link the envoys' call to "foreign intervention." The UK high commissioner responded at the time with a terse statement that the meeting had been prearranged (the military claimed otherwise) and "the subject of foreign military intervention was not raised in the meeting." Commander Bainimarama himself later echoed the accusation of incitement to mutiny. In a press statement April 13, Bainimarama made the same claim (septel).

14. (SBU) In his remarks to the Iraq-bound troops, Driti singled out Australia and New Zealand for criticism, saying their reactions to Fiji's coup were unfair, childish and "full of outright hypocrisy." He is quoted in the Fiji Times as saying that if he ever came into power, he "might certainly close the Australian and New Zealand embassies." Some other reporting implied that he also threatened the U.S. embassy and UK high commission with closure.

15. (SBU) The U.S., UK and Australian missions issued the

following joint media release on April 13.

Begin text

Joint statement by the U.S. Embassy, Australian High Commission and British High Commission in response to comments by Land Force Commander Pita Driti on 12 April 2007

"The U.S. Ambassador and the High Commissioners of the United Kingdom and Australia met with then acting RFMF Commander Teleni and Land Forces Commander Driti on 28 November 2006 on instructions from their governments. The RFMF subsequently made allegations about that meeting, which the U.S., Australia and the UK refuted on 29 November. The object of the meeting on 28 November was to discuss the ongoing civil-military crisis, and to urge the RFMF to respect constitutional processes and to not undertake a coup. The diplomats also outlined the types of sanctions and other measures that might be imposed if a coup occurred. There was no attempt to incite mutiny."

End text.

DINGER